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ABSTRACT

A project designed to insure that all teachers who receive their undergraduate training at the University of South Dakota are prepared to deal with handicapped children is described. It was realized at the inception of the project that the following major obstacles would have to be faced: (1) a resistance to change on the part of the faculty; (2) a lack of commitment from those in charge of the training of regular educators; and (3) negative attitudes toward special students and special education in general. To overcome these obstacles, an intensive program for training key faculty was developed and initial designs for curriculum revision were drawn up. The reorganization of special, elementary, and secondary education areas into one division was a priority in overcoming the gap between special education and regular education. A discussion is presented of future plans and strategies that will be implemented to overcome faculty resistance to the changes in preservice education that are implicit in successfully fulfilling the mandate for mainstreaming. (JD)

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A PROJECT TO PROVIDE REGULAR EDUCATION PRESERVICE TO FACILITATE EDUCATION OF THE HANDICAPPED IN THE LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT

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PROJECT BACKGROUND

A major area of professional preparation at The University of South Dakota is in the field of education. The School of Education accounts for some 30 percent of the graduates at The University. Approximately 200 preservice teachers in early childhood, elementary, secondary, and special education are graduated each year. As these teachers leave USD, they must have the knowledge and skills that will allow them to comply with both the spirit and the letter of the laws regarding educating the handicapped.

During the 79-80 school year, the School of Education at The University of South Dakota began a major reorganization, with the appointment of Dr. Roberta Anderson as Dean. The School of Education faculty, under the direction of Dean Anderson, reorganized themselves into four divisions. The elementary, secondary, and special education prefixes joined together to form the Division of Curriculum and Instruction (C & I). Dean Anderson identified as a priority need the production of a curriculum revision plan by C & I which would incorporate the skills and knowledge needed by all educators to work with exceptional learners in the least restrictive environment.

In the fall of 1979, an RFP for Dean's Grant applications was circulated among the School of Education faculty. Dr. Robert Wood, a Professor in elementary education, who had during the previous year attended a retreat sponsored by the Augustana College Dean's Grant, approached other faculty members to address the need for a Dean's Grant at USD. A task force was appointed by Dean Anderson to develop a proposal that would answer the need for curriculum revision. Dr. Wood and I attended a

Discrepancy Evaluation Model Type I Workshop sponsored by The Evaluation Training Consortium at Western Michigan University. At the workshop we were assisted by consultants who were familiar with problems encountered in other Dean's Grant projects; and, as a result, activities aimed at overcoming past weaknesses were incorporated in the grant proposal. The proposal was written, submitted, and funded off cycle. Dean Anderson serves as Project Director to provide key administrative leadership and Dr. Wood and I serve as co-coordinators of the project.

PROJECT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The ultimate aim of the Dean's Grant Project at The University of South Dakota (as it is with all Dean's Grants) is to facilitate the education of handicapped children in the least restrictive environment. The overall goal of the project is to insure that all teachers who receive their undergraduate training at USD are prepared to deal with and teach handicapped children. For this goal to be reached, a sweeping redesign and modification of the entire teacher education program must be made. In order to bring about such a change, according to Weisenstein and Gall (1978), faculty attitudes need to be altered and knowledge increased through planning and direct participation in project activities.

Major obstacles that previous Dean's Grants have met include: 1) overcoming a resistance to change on the part of faculty, 2) a lack of commitment to the project on the part of those in charge of the training of regular educators, and 3) negative attitudes exhibited toward special students and special education in general (Weisenstein and Gall, 1978).

In an effort to overcome these obstacles, activities during the first year of the project have focused on selecting and training an advisory committee composed of key faculty from the Division of Curriculum and

Instruction, support faculty and, local educators. Activities for the second year of the project will be centered around the training of the remaining C & I faculty and additional support staff in the skills and knowledge required to educate exceptional learners in the least restrictive environment.

As a result of the project, thirty faculty members and support personnel will have received training on matters dealing with the mandates of PL 94-142, communication skills, and curriculum revision through systems planning. The final product coming forth from the project will be a written plan for revision of the undergraduate teacher education curriculum. The focus of the revised curriculum will be to prepare teachers to work with handicapped children in whatever environment they are found.

Specific objectives for The University of South Dakota Dean's Grant Project include:

Year 1

1.0 Selection and organization of an Advisory Committee by the project's administrative personnel.

1.1 Structure of the committee will include members of the Curriculum and Instruction Division faculty and representatives from the undergraduate student body, LEA's and The University of South Dakota support staff (e.g., HPER, School Psychology, etc.)

2.0 Self-assessment of the Advisory Committee's training needs

3.0 The writing of a training plan by the Advisory Committee.

3.1 Content of the Plan

3.1.1 Skills in implementing change to overcome faculty resistance to revision of the undergraduate curriculum.

3.1.2 The law as it relates to the education of handicapped children in the LRE.

3.1.3 Interpersonal communication skills to facilitate work with Curriculum and Instruction faculty.

3.1.4 Instruction of handicapped children in the LRE.

3.1.5 Systems approach to curriculum development and revision of undergraduate teacher education program.

3.2 The selection of consultants to participate in training of the Advisory Committee.

4.0 Training will begin for the Advisory Committee with a 3 day retreat.

5.0 The Advisory Committee will have completed their training as described by them in their plan.

6.0 The Advisory Committee will complete a plan for training of the entire Curriculum and Instruction faculty and other support staff who deal with the undergraduate teacher preparation program.

Year 2

1.0 The trained Advisory Committee will organize a training program for Curriculum and Instruction faculty and support staff involved in preparing undergraduate education students.

1.1 The Advisory Committee will purchase and/or produce training materials.

1.2 The five outlined training areas will be addressed.

2.0 A faculty retreat will be conducted for a 2-3 day period.

3.0 Additional training information through workshops, lectures, and seminars will be held for Curriculum and Instruction faculty and support staff.

4.0 The trained Curriculum and Instruction faculty and support staff will be assessed to determine their readiness to develop a plan for the revision of the undergraduate teacher education program.

5.0 Initial work on a curriculum revision plan will begin.

PROJECT STRATEGIES

A variety of strategies are being used at The University of South Dakota in an attempt to overcome the obstacles, described by Weisenstein and Gall (1980), that past Dean's Grants have faced.

Curriculum and Instruction Division. The reorganization of special, elementary, and secondary education areas into one division was a key step in overcoming the gap between special education and regular education. Collaboration has been hampered in the past by the traditional practice of having separate departments of special education and teacher education.

Advisory Committee. Research has shown that the change process is facilitated when persons who run a new program feel ownership for it (Berman and McLaughlin, 1975). It was felt that having the Advisory Committee assess their own needs, plan their own training program, and then help in the training of the rest of the faculty the following year would help create the ownership needed for making program changes at USD. The full C & I faculty will follow the same procedures of assessing their needs and planning their training prior to actually writing the curriculum revision plan.

Creating a pay-off for faculty has also been shown to be a successful strategy. The Advisory Committee is receiving direct monetary reward for their involvement in project activities during both years of the project. During the second year of the project monies have been set aside for the additional C & I faculty members who will be trained. Other rewards are also being provided to Advisory Committee members and faculty. These include training retreats planned for both years of the project and asking selected faculty to give presentations and write articles to be used in training.

Self Assessment. A series of pre-training assessments have been conducted to help the Advisory Committee plan their training needs. The initial instrument administered was a Stages of Concern Questionnaire (SoCQ) developed by Gene Hall at The University of Texas (Austin). The SoCQ

was used to analyze the Advisory Committee's concerns regarding the process of mainstreaming. Mike Kerr, the evaluator of the Dean's Grant Project at USD, has worked with Dr. William Halloway on The University of Kansas Dean's Grant using the SoCQ (Halloway & Kerr, 1980). He provided the needed expertise to interpret the results. However, prior to receiving feedback about the formal concerns assessment, the Advisory Committee members were asked to voice and discuss their concerns openly. This strategy of open discussion was used to encourage individuals to ventilate negative feelings and frustration. The process of ventilating feeling is one of those mentioned by Chance and Campbell (1980) as effective in reducing the start-up trauma of Dean's Grants.

It was encouraging to find that the concerns mentioned during the open discussion periods were focused on the same areas identified as peak concerns by the SoCQ. The results indicated that the Advisory Committee's peak concerns centered on three stages: stage 1, information; stage 4, consequence; and stage 5, collaboration. The committee wanted to learn more about PL 94-142 and mainstreaming. They also were concerned about the consequences of LRE education for all school students and teachers' in-training. Finally, the Committee expressed a felt need for collaboration among faculty and educators in the field in implementation of PL 94-142 mandates.

In addition to the concerns assessment, an attitudinal survey was given to Advisory Committee members to determine their perceptions of situations which may arise in the course of implementing education in the least restrictive environment. The results of the survey showed agreement with the results of the concerns questionnaire. There were strong feelings of agreement among Committee members on the following points: 1) teacher

training programs need alteration to meet the mandates of PL 94-142, 2) handicapped children are likely to benefit socially from mainstreaming, 3) regular educators need to understand the guidelines used to identify handicapped children, and 4) lower academic achievements should not be expected from handicapped students. Undecided responses indicated indecision from Committee members in two main areas. The first was the potential success of current regular education graduates at USD in teaching mainstreamed classrooms. The second point of indecision focused on the benefits of PL 94-142 on public education in general and the academic achievement of non-handicapped students.

Finally, the committee was given a cognitive assessment instrument which tested their knowledge of interpersonal communication skills, curriculum planning, and mainstreaming (i.e., definitions, principles of PL 94-142, educational services for handicapped students, and IEP content and development). The results of this instrument indicated that the Committee possessed substantial knowledge of interpersonal communication skills and the definitions of mainstreaming. A need for additional training in the areas of curriculum planning, services for the handicapped, IEP's, and PL 94-142 was indicated (See Table 1).

Insert Table 1 Here

The results of the assessment instruments were used by Committee members to plan their own training activities. Activities outlined to this point include a retreat, bi-weekly meetings with presentations and discussions, and attendance at the National Dean's Grant Conference.

Faculty Training. The initial Advisory Committee training activity will be a retreat. One prime focus of the presentations and activities will

be to sensitize the committee members to the needs and concerns of exceptional children. Chance and Campbell (1980) suggest that this is a key to changing attitudes and encouraging acceptance of handicapped individuals. Another focus will be on providing information about what PL 94-142 and state laws really say about educating exceptional children so as to clarify misunderstandings. A third area of critical importance will involve communication skills useful in resolving conflicts and overcoming resistance to change.

Following the retreat, the Advisory Committee will meet to plan further training activities they feel they need. It is anticipated that these activities will include workshops and field experiences that will prepare the committee to write a training plan for the rest of the C & I faculty.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

At this time, we are less than six months into our project at The University of South Dakota. Activities have proceeded on schedule and the Dean's Grant Advisory Committee is working well together. However, the project staff is very much aware that overcoming resistance to change is an ongoing and long term process. We must be prepared to deal with extended resistance by faculty. We must also face the fact that a university atmosphere is not conducive to united action and quick adoption. In closing, I would like to say that we are encouraged by our success to this point and are looking forward to working with other Dean's Grant Projects that have faced and solved the problems we will encounter in the future.

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Table 1

Assessment Area	% of Response by Committee Correct	Incorrect	Don't Know
Interpersonal Communication Skills	76	16	15
Curriculum Planning	54	33	13
Mainstreaming			
a. Definitions	85	13	3
b. Services for handicapped	54	26	20
c. IEP's	40	22	38
d. PL 94-142	37	22	41